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Georgetown's Media Profs

A University Thinks Hard About Its Think Tank

By Alison Muscatine

THE PHOTOGRAPHS in the fourth-floor lobby of the Center for Strategic and International Studies make it clear that this is no ordinary faculty lounge. On one wall are black-and-white photographs of Henry Kissinger, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Zbigniew Brzezinski, James Schlesinger—all hawkish defenders of military power, all former government officials, all current or former "faculty" at this peculiar institution.

Apart from knowing the center's reputation as a parking lot for former government big shots, few in Washington can tell you exactly what the center does. Apparently neither can CSIS's parent organization, Georgetown University. Now the university's president, the Rev. Timothy S. Healy, wants to find out. He has appointed a committee of five highly respected intellectuals to review CSIS, with particular focus on the quality of research done by the 140 fellows at the center.

"What we're talking about is a very serious, academic review," Healy says. "It's a kind of periodic review."

Other than that, Healy provides few clues. But rumors are rampant that the center's reputation as a conservative propaganda machine may be what motivated the former professor of English literature to assemble his panel of experts.

Why do questions about the caliber of the center's academic research arise?

Perhaps because CSIS doesn't have a library. Perhaps because CSIS "faculty" are seen more often on television news shows than in a classroom: The day after the U.S. bombing of Libya, for example, three CSIS fellows were assembled as guests on the MacNeil-Lehrer news-hour—Brzezinski, G. Henry M. Schuler and George A. Carver Jr. On the first night that the disaster in Chernobyl was reported in the West, Thane Gustafson, director of CSIS' Soviet program, appeared on the evening news on ABC and NBC, MacNeil-Lehrer and ABC's "Nightline" (CBS Evening News filmed him but did not use the clip), and he wrote the lead article for The Washington Post's Outlook section on May 4. Robert H. Kupperman, CSIS' director of science and technology, was interviewed on the BBC, CBS "Nightwatch," CNN, National Public Radio and quoted in stories in The Wall Street Journal and Newsweek among others in connection with the Libyan strike.

In total, during the six weeks spanning the terrorist bombing of a disco in West

Germany, the Libyan strike and the Chernobyl nuclear accident, CSIS fellows had 650 media contacts—television appearances, op-ed columns, and quotations in news stories—far more than have been tallied over the years by the Georgetown professoriate.

But that's not all. If the absence of books and the emphasis on media aren't enough to make a liberal Jesuit cringe, the center, for much of its 24-year history, also has had a reputation for being a superficial (by academic standards), right-wing think tank.

Founded in 1962 with a budget of \$120,000 and housed in a Georgetown townhouse, its first full-time staff member was Richard V. Allen, a conservative Republican who later became President Reagan's first national security affairs adviser. Most of CSIS' money, in the early years, came from right-wing foundations such as the Scaife Foundation, connected to the Mellon family in Pittsburgh, and from conservative philanthropists such as Justin Dart.

In 1972, students at Georgetown tried to get the university to shut the center, insisting (incorrectly) that it was supported by CIA funds. Whatever the students' distaste, even some conservative fellows found the place disappointing intellectually. "When I went, I held my nose," said one prominent CSIS fellow who has been at CSIS since the mid-1970s. "Walter Laqueur [a highly regarded historian who is also on the Georgetown faculty] was there, but apart from him the rest were duds. I was appalled by the complete lack of scholarship."

Relationships between universities and research centers are often odd and uncomfortable. Stanford University closed the Stanford Research Institute—later renamed SRI—during the Vietnam War, and now is in constant battles with its conservative Hoover Institution on War, Peace and Revolution. The University of California has had uneasy dealings with its Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, where classified research on nuclear weapons is a staple. CSIS, for its part, never participates in classified or proprietary projects, and limits its government contracts to less than 15 percent of its work. Although the center technically is not a lobbying outfit, questions linger about its active role in the pub-

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lic policy world.

"I have never heard of CSIS making bombs," says one high-ranking university official, an off-hand reference to the Lawrence Livermore Lab at UC. "But they do seek to influence policy."

Over the years, CSIS has attracted prominent conservatives from in and out of government, including Kissinger (an endowed chair is being established in his name), former United Nations ambassador Kirkpatrick, former secretary of defense Schlesinger, former national security affairs advisers Zbigniew Brzezinski and, as of March 1, Robert McFarlane. Other prime acquisitions have been former deputy CIA director Ray S. Cline and military theorist Edward Luttwak.

Fortifying the center's conservative image, President Reagan has chosen CSIS as a favorite site for speeches attacking liberals who oppose U.S. aid for the contras, the counterrevolutionaries who are fighting the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. And CSIS research projects have tended to emphasize politico-military issues. The center now is in the midst of studies of crisis management (including a recent simulation of managing the Philippines crisis, during which Richard Helms played the head of the CIA), the role of the Soviet military in Soviet society (CSIS is the hub for an international computer network, Sovset, linking 100 scholars in Europe and North American who specialize in Soviet studies), and defense reform.

Most of all, however, CSIS fellows have become highly visible on the talk-show circuit in the nation's capital—certainly more so than members of the Georgetown faculty. By sponsoring hundreds of seminars and colloquia and an array of "congressional study groups" (seminars that bring together experts, administration officials and members of Congress to discuss topical issues), the center has managed to solidify its ties to the executive branch and to members of Congress and to become institutionalized in the public policy arena.

The center records how many "media contacts" its fellows have in a given year (4,100 in 1985) and devotes one page of its bimonthly newsletter to a feature called "CSIS—People," which catalogues contacts with the press. A recent issue, for example, noted that one fellow "conferred with CNN, the New York Post, Time, The New York Times, VOA, Business Week, ABC News, and National Public Radio" during an OPEC oil pricing meeting.

While CSIS fellows and senior fellows do the bulk of research at the center, four "counselors" in residence—Kissinger, Brze-

zinski, Schlesinger and McFarlane—deliver lectures each year that draw more attention to the center. As CSIS president Amos B. Jordan says, "We'll pile on two or three of them" for major events.

Clearly, CSIS has thrived on its publicity. The question is, has Georgetown?

Assigned to find out is Healy's panel of experts, handpicked by the university president and oozing with respectability. The chairman is retired general Andrew J. Goodpaster, whom Healy describes as "the intellectual of the military." He is joined by Jaroslav Pelikan, a world-renowned religious historian at Yale who, Healy says, will keep in mind Georgetown's moral and religious context while reviewing CSIS; political scientist Samuel Huntington of Harvard; legal historian Stanley Katz of Princeton; and historian Michael Howard of Oxford.

Healy likens the CSIS review to an accreditation process, and says that all university agencies are evaluated every five years. The committee visited CSIS for the first time in March and its evaluation will focus on the center's process for appointing fellows, as well as the quantity and quality of its publications. "What we're talking about is a very serious, academic review," says Healy, an English literature scholar. "It's a kind of periodic review."

The committee was unanimous in its approval of specific recommendations for CSIS. So far the recommendations and the body of the committee report have been completed in a first draft, which one member characterized as "understanding," suggesting that the panel perhaps has been charitable in assessing criticisms of CSIS. The final draft will be completed in the coming months.

Healy—a Jesuit priest who during his decade at the helm of Georgetown has spoken out against the Moral Majority and Reagan budget cuts and who returned a check with a contribution for Georgetown from the government of Libya—says the presence of high-profile conservatives at CSIS did not precipitate the review.

"That doesn't bother me," Healy says. "They look for brains and they pick them up. I want to make sure that, since they bear Georgetown's name, they don't make anyone blush over what they do academically. If they are doing anything they aren't supposed to do, these guys [the committee] will find out. None of these guys are for sale, they are not playing games, they are not ideologues. They are hard-ass academics."

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Although a number of fellows said the university review is a good idea—a massive, year-long internal “self-evaluation” was completed at CSIS in March—Healy’s interest also has touched a nerve.

“I was flabbergasted by the university intervention,” said one senior fellow. “The university is not a top-flight university, where CSIS is a top-flight center. The university resents this fact. The university would like us to be policy mice running around feeding memoranda to the Reagan administration people But now CSIS has its share of celebrities and of middle-echelon people who wouldn’t be seen dead in the university. If [these CSIS fellows] were academics, they would be at premier Ivy League institutions.”

As the center has grown—it has doubled in size since 1979—its affiliation with Georgetown has remained conveniently loose. While faculty members at the university exist in a scholarly environment defined by the campus clocktower, undergraduates, midterm exams and publish-or-perish rules, the fellows at CSIS lead a relatively cushy life. Appointed by CSIS, most senior fellows don’t teach courses and are well-paid, with annual earnings reaching as high as the \$70,000-plus range (while the average tenured professor at Georgetown receives a salary of about \$45,000).

Fellows also get standard faculty perks such as access to Yates gym and university medical benefits. Tenure is not an issue; appointments are for one year, but rarely is someone severed if they want to stay longer. The center raises its entire budget, which totalled \$8.7 million this year. Its biggest donors are Scaife and Prince Turki bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia, but CSIS now has 300 other backers, including mainstream foundations such as Rockefeller, Carnegie, Ford and even The New York Times.

But although its focus has remained public policy and strategic issues, the center has craved academic and political respectability and has made a conscious effort to moderate its ideological label. To that end, CSIS in the past decade has created four endowed chairs, diversified its funding sources and recruited a few Democrats who specialize in arms control and peace issues. It also publishes The Washington Quarterly and a series of small paperbacks called The Washington Papers, which are often sold as textbooks on foreign affairs.

Says fellow Edward Luttwak: “I have witnessed a steady rise in the quality of research, from prosaic at best [in past years] to original work of genuine scholarship.”

CSIS President Jordan, a West Point graduate, Rhodes scholar and Pentagon of-

ficial in the Ford administration, says the center’s work is “a blend of scholarly research and *action*-oriented policy.” (In some CSIS publications fellows are referred to as “*action* intellectuals,” a term that somehow lends the impression that intellectuals at Georgetown are better known for “inaction”). Although conceding that CSIS could make more use of the university’s resources, Jordan says that the center has developed “an extraordinary network and appeal” on Capitol Hill and in the White House by providing “relevant” public policy information to government officials. “They don’t want a book or a typical scholarly tome . . . that is heavily footnoted, and narrowly focused. What they want is to have ideas translated into their idiom,” he says.

The emphasis on “relevance” as opposed to scholarship and the center’s success at generating publicity (“It’s like amoebas dividing,” Jordan says of CSIS’ press contacts) contributes to a common perception that CSIS is merely a roost for former government celebrities, particularly those who want to propagandize for the Reagan administration.

“The criticism of the place [CSIS] is that it is not a scholarly place but a place to get people on TV,” says one respected senior fellow.

“There have been obvious problems between the university and the center,” says another fellow. “As I understand it, some university officials feel the center is too close to the administration, and too one-sided. But that certainly has changed.”

One of CSIS’ favorite examples of its new-found “objectivity” was a project last year on military reorganization, headed by fellow Barry S. Blechman, former assistant director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency in the Carter administration. The project resulted in a report that concluded the military should be more centralized. Although the Department of Defense was able to squelch a similar report at the conservative Heritage Foundation, the CSIS project received publicity and mightily annoyed Secretary of the Navy John F. Lehman, Jr.

“Whenever we do one of these it stirs things up,” says Jordan. “But our reputation for credibility and objectivity goes up, too.”

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Some fellows said the attention given to CSIS has obscured the quality of scholarship at the center. "The quantifiable indicators are up over the last three years," said fellow Brad Roberts, who also serves as Jordan's executive assistant. "The number of publications, the number of reviews in professional periodicals and the strength of approval in the reviews. Those are all tangible things. The intangibles—they may make nice scholarly ideas—but do they make a difference?"

"I think Father Healy considers us a legitimate part of the university, [but the publicity] is difficult for formal department members to take," said one fellow. "I don't buy at all the argument that Healy is lining up to give us the boot. Georgetown University is on a campaign to make itself a university appropriate to the nation's capital, one with a national and international reputation. We are not the first object of his attention nor will we be the last."

Says Jordan: "With excellence, objectivity and balance so a part of his value structure, it's surprising he didn't get around to this exercise sooner."

"Let's face it," says another fellow, who is less disturbed by the committee evaluation. "The biggest asset Georgetown has is [former basketball star] Patrick Ewing. CSIS pales in comparison to the basketball team."

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